1;Griffiths M-5 (ca. 1940) 1946 AW37 Kol AW37

622 community and has come to be recognized as such largely by his personal worth, wisdom and character. There is no formal election of the head-men; they were recognized as such by a kind of social [624] gravitation. Usually the *Mahata* has an assistant known as the *Chhariberdar*, who does most of the necessary running around. The *Mahata* is not the sole authority and is not empowered to act or even to make decisions of any importance without first consulting the more influential heads of the community. But he usually takes the initiative in calling together the leaders of the local group if factors requiring a meeting come to his knowledge, or if a definite request for it is made.

623 The ultimate authority of the local group rests with the village *panch* or *panchayat*, literally 'the council of five'. The *panch*, however, is not to be thought of as limited to five members only, for it is usually composed of all the influential adult males of the community. They must possess, in the words of the Kols, "*dharam aur dhan*"—piety and property—if they are to be regarded worthy of a place in the *panchayat*. There are however, no elections to the Kol *panchayats*. The leader may or may not recognize one as a member of the group, and while others may attend and even take part in the discussions, they have no right to decide on the ultimate issue.

Practically all major and minor issues affecting the life of the community are decided by the *panch* which thus forms a council for the arbitration of matters pertaining to the community. Its power is really remarkable and the decisions of the *panchayat* are rigidly respected. It is dangerous for a member of the community to go against its advice [626] or decision, for in most cases the *panch* can bring to bear upon the recalcitrant such strong social pressure that he is practically cut off from his community, which means that he is a man without a country or a caste. Personally he may be cut off from all social intercourse, from the use of the well and other village amenities; he is not invited to any functions and is treated as an outcaste. But worse yet, he can neither get his children married, nor admitted into the tribe.

Some of the matters which a Kol *panchayat* deals with include 623 the following:
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1. Eating and drinking with other castes if such has been forbidden or is against custom.
2. Sexual abberations not approved by the usual Kol practices.
3. Marriage matters: selecting the bride or the bridegroom if there is any difficulty or dispute; arbitration of disputes over financial aspects of the marriage. Irregular unions dealt with and suitable penalties determined.